

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-10 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00

INRE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 A-01 OPR-02 SY-05 OC-05 CCO-00

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6334

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL STUTTGART

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY

USCINCEUR

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

DIA WASHDC

CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 11858

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, LE

SUBJECT: SECURITY IN BEIRUT: THE PENDULUM SWINGS UNCERTAINLY TO
OPTIMISM AGAIN

REF: BEIRUT 11797

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1. SUMMARY: THE BEIRUT SECURITY SITUATION AS OF 1500 (LOCAL)

SEPT 23 IS MUCH IMPROVED OVER YESTERDAY, BUT SKIRMISHES CONTINUE AND TENSIONS REMAIN HIGH. A NEW FORMULA FOR POLICING A CEASEFIRE HAS BEEN WORKED OUT BY SYRIAN FORMIN KHADDAM SO FAR IT IS WORKING. BUT MUCH DEPENDS ON PROGRESS IN NEXT FEW DAYS ON FORMING A POLITICAL RECONCILIATION COMMITTEE THAT IS STILL XAGHONIC. MARONITE LEADERS ARE HOLDING A MEETING TODAY UNDER PATRIARCH TO STUDY THEIR POSITION. BEIRUT ECONOMY STILL ON ITS KNEES. FOREIGN COMMUNITY IS LEAVING IN INCREASING NUMBERS. A MAJOR EXODUS OF FOREIGN BUSINESS REPRESENTATIVES MAY OCCUR IN COMING MONTHS IF STRIFE CONTINUES. END SUMMARY.

2. THE SECURITY PICTURE IN BEIRUT AS OF 1500 (LOCAL) SEPT 23 HAS IMPROVED CONSIDERABLY OVER THE GLOOMY PROSPECTS OF YESTERDAY. THE CEASEFIRE ARRANGED LAST WEEKEND UNDER THE AEGIS OF SYRIAN FORMIN ZADDAM IS BACK ON TRACK. THE FRIGILITY OF THE SITUATION IS OBVIOUS TO EVERYONE, HOWEVER, AND THE CITY REMAINS LARGELY SHUT DOWN AS BEIRUT RADIO AGAIN ADVISES PEOPLE SEPT 23 TO STAY HOME UNTIL CALM IS FIRMLY RESTORED. AS CRISIS CONTINUES, A DEEPENING PESSIMISM IS SETTLING IN UNDER THE FLUCTUATING MOODS. MORALE OF ARMY AND INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES IS PERSISTENTLY POOR.

3. AS NIGHT APPROACHED YESTERDAY, FEARS GREW THAT A STORMY NIGHT WAS BREWING. NEWS SPREAD OF SHARP ARGUMENT BETWEEN

PRES FRANGIE AND KHADDAM DURING THE MORNING AND OF LATTER'S INTENTION IN EARLY AFTERNOON TO RETURN TO DAMASCUS WITH TRUCE UNREALIZED. FORTUNATELY INTERVENTION OF CHAMOUNA AND OTHER (INCLUDING GEMAYEL BY ONE REPORT) QUICKLY HEALED BREACH-- WHICH HAD CENTERED ON FRANGIE'S WISH TO APPEAL TO ARAB LEAGUE, A MOVE KHADDAM OPPOSED AS TOO SLOW. INTENSIVE MEETINGS INVOLVING LEADERS OF BOTH FIGHTING CAMPS FINALLY BROUGHT AGREEMENT WHEREBY (A) FRANGIE AND CHAMOUN, WITH GEMAYEL'S CONSENT, "GUARANTEED" CEASEFIRE ON PART OF CHRISTIANS AND (B) KHADDAM, AFTER CONTACT WITH BROAD SPECTRUM OF MOSLEMS AND LEFTIST, "GUARANTEED" CEASEFIRE ON OTHER SIDE. THE FORMULA WORKED, AS NIGHTTIME FIGHTING PROVED RELATIVELY SUBDUED. NEW PHALANGE CLANDESTINE RADIO ASKED ITS MEN TO STOP SHOOTING. TRUCE IS MORE OR LESS HOLDING SO CONFIDENTIAL

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FAR SEPT 23, ALTHOUGH SNIPER FIRE DOWNTOWN AND SKIRMISHES AT ASHRAFIYEH AND SIN EL FIL CONTINUE TO BE REPORTED. AN EYEWITNESS REPORT THAT PHALANGE IS HOLDING FIRE. PERSISTENT REPORTS OF DEPLETED PHALANAGE AMMUNITION STOCKS MAY PARTLY ACCOUNT FOR THIS.

4. IMPORTANT MEETING OF MARONITES IS NOW UNDERWAY AT BKERKE UNDER PATRIARCH. RELIGIOUS AND LAY MARONITE LEADERS

ARE ATTENDING, INCLUDING FORMER LEBANESE PRESIDENTS, HEAD OF MARONITE LEAGUE, GEMAYEL, AND RAYMOND EDDE. DURING SOMBER MOOD OF YESTERDAY EVENING, WHEN CHRISTIANS WERE NOTICEABLY SENSITIVE OF THEIR INCREASINGLY BELEAGUED POSITION, RUMORS SPREAD THAT BKERKE MEETING WOULD RESULT IN APPEAL TO INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY FOR SUPPORT OF SOME DRASTIC BUT HALF-THOUGHT-OUT SOLUTION LIKE PARTITION OF LEBANON (I.E., ESTABLISHING MOUNT LEBANON AS INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN ENCLAVE). HOWEVER, BRIGHTER PROSPECTS OF A.M. SEPT 23 GAVE HOPE THAT MEETING WOULD TAKE MODERATE LINE. A CONCILIATORY LETTER FROM JUMBLATT TO PATRIARCH AND A PRESS REPORT OF A LETTER FROM POPE TO PATRIARCH HAVE ADDED TO THIS OPTIMISM. VISIBLE CHRISTIAN DESPERATION YESTERDAY MAY ACTUALLY HAVE BEEN TACTIC ON PART OF CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP TO PRESS MOSLEMS INTO SOFTER LINE.

5. OTHER MEETINGS TODAY WILL ALSO ATTEMPT RESOLVE THE CRISIS. KHADDAM IS SEEING THE MARONITE PATRIARCH AT BKERKE BEFORE THE MARONITE GATHERING. JUMBLATT'S "PROGRESSIVES" WILL HOLD A SESSION OF THEIR OWN. ACTIVITIES WILL FOCUS ON CREATION OF "COMMITTEE OF NATIONAL DIALOGUE" OF 6 TO 8 PERSONS COMPRISING REPRESENTATIVES OF THE MAJOR RELIGIONS AS SECOND STAGE OF ARMISTICE. JUMBLATT'S GROUP APPEARS TO BE HOLDING OUT FOR PRIOR ACCEPTANCE OF AT LEAST SOME PORTION OF LEFTIST PROGRAM AS PRICE FOR ANY RECONCILIATION. CEASEFIRE WILL BE VOLATILE AS LONG AS THIS ISSUE REMAINS UNSETTLED.

6. BEIRUT'S ECONOMY IS STILL ON ITS KNEES. FOOD SHORTAGE CONTINUES, EVEN THOUGH VEGETABLE VENDORS ARE APPEARING MORE FREQUENTLY ON THE STREETS. FUEL STOCKS IN COUNTRY ARE HIGH AND OIL TANKER SHIP HAS BEEN OFF SHORE FOR SEVERAL DAYS WAITING TO UNLOAD GASOLINE, BUT FUEL SHORTAGE REMAINS A PROBLEM BECAUSE FILLING STATIONS HAVE NOT REOPENED AND TRUCKS HAVE NOT

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BEEN ABLE TO MAKE DELIVERIES TO BAKERIES AND OTHER ESSENTIAL ACTIVITIES. GOVERNMENT RADIO HAS WARNED OF DISEASE AND PESTILENCE AS A RESULT OF GARBAGE PILING UP IN THE STREETS AND HAS REQUESTED THAT IT BE BURNED. PASSENGER TRAFFIC IN AND OUT OF AIRPORT IS DOWN SUBSTANTIALLY TODAY, AND PAN AM IS CONSIDERING CUTTING SOME FLIGHTS AT END OF WEEK IF LIGHT LOADS CONTINUE.

7. MEANWHILE, MEMBERS OF BEIRUT'S FOREIGN COMMUNITY ARE LEAVING IN INCREASING NUMBERS. ASIDE FROM THE OBVIOUS IMPLICATIONS OF PERSONAL SAFETY, AMERICAN BUSINESSMEN NOTE THAT THE CIVIL DISORDERS HAVE DISRUPTED OPERATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS TO THE POINT WHERE IT IS NOW NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO DO BUSINESS IN OR FROM LEBANON. AS MOST COMPANIES EXPECT CONTINUED PERIODIC CIVIL DISRUPTIONS, STAGE MAY BE SET FOR CONTRACTION OF RESIDENT BUSINESS COMMUNITY IN COMING MONTHS.

INGERSOLLARAND, FOR EXAMPLE, EXPECTS TO MAINTAIN A BEIRUT OFFICE, BUT SALESMEN MAY OPERATE FROM OTHER CITIES. ALTHOUGH BUSINESSMEN GENERALLY BELIEVE BEIRUT IS STILL GOOD PLACE FROM WHICH TO COVER OWDDLE EASTWN IF DIFFICULTIES CONTINUE TO INTERFERE WITH OPERATIONS MANY MAY TRANSFER AT LEAST PART OF ACTIVITIES TO ATHENS, LONDON, OR ELSEWHERE.

8. TO BEST OF EMBASSY KNOWLEDGE, ALL AMCITS ARE SAFE. HOWEVER, INGERSOLL-RAND TODAY IS EVACUATING TEN EXPATRIATE FAMILIES (ABOUT 40 PERSON, NOT ALL AMERICANS) TO LONDON UNTIL CRISIS PASSES.

9. COMMENT: EVEN IF CEASEFIRE HOLDS LOND ENOUGH TO CLOSE CURTAIN ON ROUND 4, FEW OBSERVARS AT THIS STAGE EXPECT IT WILL BE EFFECTIVE SOLUTION OF CRISIS. NGTHING BASIC HAS YET BEEN SETTLED. THERE IS GLIMMER OF HOPE THAT SOME INFLUENTIAL CHRISTIANS MAY SENSE STRATEGIC WEAKNESS OF THEIR STAND AGAINST NATIONAL PACT AMENDMENT, AND ALSO THAT SOME MOSLEMS MAY BE MORE AWARE THAN BEFORE OF EXTREME LEFTIST EXPLOITATION OF THEIR DEMANDS. BUT POLARIZATION OCCURRING BETWEEN MAJOR SEGMENTS OF CHRISTIAN AND MOSLEM COMMUNITIES GIVES LITTLE ROOM FOR MANEUVER.
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